

# Indiana House of Representatives

## News and Information

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**March 15, 2006**

### **STATEHOUSE REPORT FROM REP. DAVE CROOKS**

INDIANAPOLIS – Whenever a legislative session is over, many experts like to say that the impact of what lawmakers have accomplished will be felt for years to come. In the case of the 2006 session of the Indiana General Assembly, those sentiments are true.

This has been an unusually active short session for the Legislature, with action on such issues as property tax relief, telecommunications reform, protections for our children and stronger penalties against people who protest at military funerals. We have even dealt with a federal court order that prevents us from opening House sessions with a formal prayer.

But, more than anything else, the 2006 session will be remembered for House Bill 1008, which contains the governor's program to lease/sell the Indiana Toll Road for \$3.85 billion to a foreign group for 75 years. The plan was approved by the barest of margins in the Indiana House and passed the Senate by a wider margin.

I have never seen anything like the level of public opposition that came against the governor's plan. The majority of people I represent made it clear they are opposed to handing over assets built with their tax dollars to a foreign corporation, which then pockets the proceeds from tolls for 75 years. I felt there were better options available to the state. However, those options were never considered. That is why I voted against House Bill 1008.

Now that the bill will become law, what impact will Major Moves have on the people of Indiana?

An extension of Interstate 69 from Evansville to Indianapolis will be built, but since Marion County lawmakers demanded a new location for the north end of that extension, the start of the project will likely be delayed.

When that extension is built, it will be a toll road that likely will be owned and operated by a foreign company. People living from Indianapolis to Martinsville will not have to pay tolls to use the road, but people living at the southern end of the new interstate will.

I also believe making I-69 a toll road will limit the number of economic development opportunities for generations to come. Face it, industries would rather locate along a freeway than a toll way. However, the governor now can make I-69 a toll road and a potential operator could retain control of the road for up to 99 years. That is another reason why I voted no.

With the \$3.85 billion received from the foreign investors for the Indiana Toll Road, Indiana will begin work on around 200 road and bridge improvement projects. Six of those projects carry a price tag of around \$3.9 billion. There isn't enough money to pay for all of these projects.

Furthermore, Congress is considering a new law that might prevent the use of federal matching dollars for projects that involve foreign companies. This measure has attracted bipartisan support.

Don't be surprised if Major Moves accelerates this governor's efforts to privatize more state programs. Already, the administration is considering turning some health care services for family and children and job training operations over to private entities. Under discussion are plans to privatize state parks, prisons and hospitals.

House Bill 1008 will have enormous implications on the lives of many Hoosiers, and it continues to amaze me that

lawmakers were given only just over a month to study, debate and vote on this program. I believe more time was needed to fully analyze the impact of this initiative.

The fate of property tax relief was a little better. House Bill 1001 delivers \$100 million in relief this year by providing a one-time-only tax credit. In 2007, the maximum assessed value deduction for homesteads will be increased from \$35,000 to \$45,000, however, this shift could increase property taxes for farms and businesses.

I voted for House Bill 1001, but the 4 percent relief provided through this legislation will not offset the huge property tax increases that passed last year without my "yes" vote. Hopefully, long-term property tax relief will be debated in the 2007 session.

Looking back on this year's session, I find several other highlights that deserve mention in a wrap-up.

I don't believe enough attention was given to the telecommunications deregulation plan in House Bill 1279. Supporters feel deregulation will increase competition to provide phone, cable and Internet services. I opposed the bill because I believe the loss of regulation will reduce the quality of service and cause rate increases in telephone services, especially in rural areas where there is little or no competition.

In response to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that gave governments the right to use eminent domain to take private property for private economic development projects, we approved House Bill 1010, which restricts the use of the process. Concerns remain that this bill will enable the state to use eminent domain to seize land under the public-private partnerships proposed by the governor to complete some road improvement projects.

A series of new laws are aimed at protecting the public from people convicted of child molestation. These laws will require those convicted of molestation to be placed on lifetime parole when they are released from prison, and require some offenders to wear electronic tracking devices as a condition of parole. Other restrictions prohibit some offenders from living within 1,000 feet of a school, park or youth center or within a mile of the homes of their victims.

Lawmakers also passed a measure covering the use of fireworks in Indiana. House Bill 1099, a bill I co-authored, will allow Indiana residents to set off fireworks on their property. It will increase the state tax on fireworks, with revenue generated by the increase used to fund fire safety programs and training for professional and volunteer firefighters.

Finally, I want to mention Senate Bill 5, which will toughen the penalties against those who protest at funerals, burials or memorial services. The law responds to a recent controversy that resulted when a hate group began protesting at military funerals in Indiana.

Although this is my final Statehouse Report for the 2006 legislative session, I still look forward to seeing many of you in the months to come. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help you with a problem or answer your questions and concerns about state government.

You can call me on the toll-free Statehouse telephone number of 1-800-382-9842, e-mail me through my Internet web site at [www.IN.gov/H63](http://www.IN.gov/H63) or write to me in care of the Indiana House of Representatives, 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

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